

**DEPARTMENT OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE CONTROL**

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## **ABC & CHP CAR CRASH INVESTIGATION LEADS TO CRIMINAL CHARGES FILED BY THE BUTTE COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY**

**(Oroville)** - The Butte County District Attorney's Office has filed multiple charges in Superior Court against three individuals identified in an eight month long Target Responsibility for Alcohol Connected Emergencies (TRACE) investigation conducted by the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC).

Misdemeanor charges against 41 yr. old Maria C. Layton included four counts of furnishing alcoholic beverages to minors (S. 25658(a) of the Business and Professions Code and four counts of contributing to the delinquency of persons under 18 years of age (272 PC).

Mrs. Layton's son, 19 yr. old Chistopher J. Layton, has been charged with four counts of contributing to the delinquency of persons under 18 years of age.

Paul I. Bartholomew, a 22 year old student at Chico State University, has been charged with four counts of furnishing alcoholic beverages to minors and four counts of contributing to the delinquency of persons under 18 years of age.

The four victims in the investigation were all under 18 years of age.

Working with the California Highway Patrol (CHP) office in Oroville, an ABC Investigator from the Yuba City District Office conducted the TRACE investigation after receiving a report from the CHP and analysis of a car crash that occurred during the early morning hours of Aug. 11, 2004.

The crash took the life of 19 yr. old Nicholas T. Prater, driver of a Volkswagen Jetta after his car slammed into a tree in a rural area of south Oroville. It was later determined the driver died from crash-related injuries. A 19 year old front seat passenger, Timothy J. Witzsche, suffered severe head trauma; and after being rushed to a local hospital, was listed as comatose and later moved to an intensive care facility. James A. Norton Jr. and Michael R. Ball, two underage male passengers in the rear of the vehicle, suffered minor injuries. A CHP officer noticed the odor of alcohol at the scene of the crash and contacted ABC. ABC immediately began a TRACE investigation.

The investigation revealed that all four of the crashed vehicle's occupants had attended a birthday party for a 17 yr. old male juvenile - where a group of approximately thirty teenagers, between 16 yrs. and 19 yrs. of age, were in attendance.

The party was held at a private residence occupied by Maria Layton and her son Christopher, whose friends were the invited guests. Alcoholic beverages were provided at the party - which began in the early evening of Aug. 10, 2004.

Later that evening, Bartholomew, the college student from Chico who was also attending the birthday party, drove to a local supermarket where he purchased more alcoholic beverages with money given to him by underage party guests.

The birthday party ended at approximately 2:30 a.m., Aug. 11, when one of the injured passengers riding in the Jetta made his way back to the residence from the crash scene. Emergency personnel were summoned to the location. Based on the field reports from the CHP, interviews were conducted with approximately twenty witnesses including family members, parents and friends, minors and juveniles who attended the birthday party and other law enforcement agencies.

The TRACE (Targeting Responsibility for Alcohol Connected Emergencies) program is made possible by a California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) grant to the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control. The grant provides funding for in-depth ABC investigations of automobile crashes involving minors where the consumption of alcoholic beverages was, or may have been a contributing factor.